

# Wildcat Fire Burned Area Summary

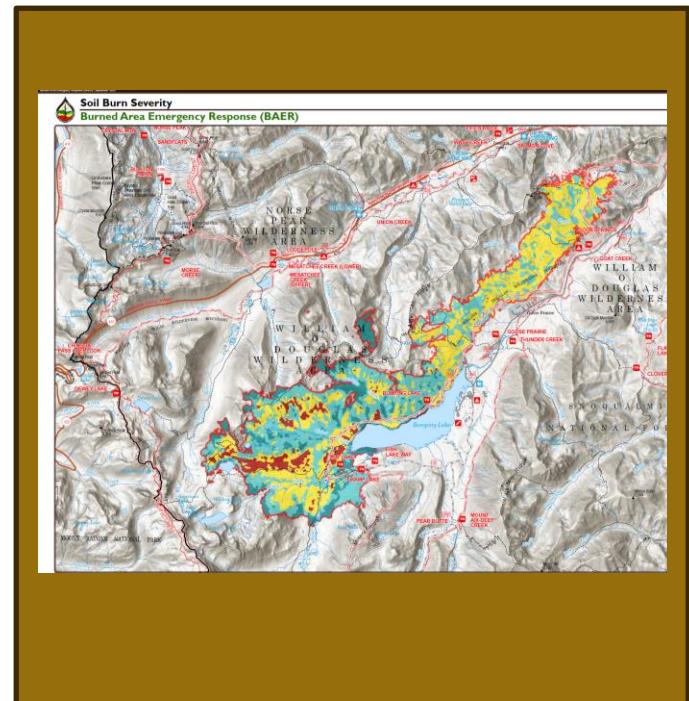
## Burned Area Report

### Fire Background

Wildcat Fire started from lightning and reported on August 25, 2025, in the William O. Douglas Wilderness. Most of the fire growth has been within the wilderness. Fire growth on Forest Service lands adjacent to Bumping Lake and Bumping River riparian areas was sporadic throughout September. As of the time of this analysis (10/07/25) the fire has burned 10,940 acres within Yakima County on United States Forest Service lands. Fuel in the area consists of large mixed conifers with understory grasses and shrubs. This fire assessment started on September 22, 2025. The area is expected to burn until a weather-ending event which is forecast by the end of October.

While many wildfires cause minimal damage to the land and pose few threats to the land or people downstream, some fires result in damage that requires special efforts to reduce impacts afterwards. The Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program is designed to identify and manage potential risks to resources on National Forest System lands and reduce these threats through appropriate emergency measures to protect human life and safety, property, and critical natural or cultural resources. BAER is an emergency program for stabilization work that involves time critical activities to be completed before damaging events to meet program objectives.

The Forest Service assembled a BAER team on 10/7/2025 for the Wildcat Fire. This team of experts in various resource disciplines began assessing the post-fire effects to critical values on Forest Service lands. Impacts to the soil are the primary indicator of potential post-fire changes in watershed response, as well as watershed recovery. The team developed soil burn severity (SBS) maps to document the degree to which the fires had changed



soil properties. Using the SBS map, physical scientists can predict erosion potential, changes to runoff and flood flows, and increased geologic hazards. Field evaluations and modeling results are used to determine relative increases in post-fire risk to different critical values and inform recommendations to address these increased risks.

### Soils

Soil burn severity is not an assessment of vegetation consumption, but rather an integration of vegetation loss, changes in soil structure and infiltration capacity, remaining vegetation, duff, or ash, and soil color, all of which may indicate relative degrees of soil heating.

The final soil burn severity maps were developed with ESRI ArcGIS software using satellite-imagery-derived Burned Area Reflectance Classification (BARC) and field survey data. Field work included assessment of ash characteristics, ground cover, root condition, soil structure, soil

water-repellency, and vegetation burn severity as described in the Field Guide for Mapping Post-fire Soil Burn Severity (Parsons et al. 2010). High burn severity is characterized by a complete consumption of organic material with the surface layers of the soil resulting in a change to single-grain structure. Fine roots are commonly charred or consumed 3-5 cm deep. The highest-severity areas often have a loose, dusty appearance, and no longer have any cohesion or soil strength. Generally, there will be less destruction of soil organic matter, roots, and structure in an area mapped as moderate compared to high. In areas mapped as moderate SBS, soil structure, roots, and litter layer may remain intact beneath a thin ash layer. Low soil burn severity results in very little alteration of soil organic matter and little or no change in soil structural stability.

Mapped and validated SBS for the burned area area resulted in very low (14%), low (38%) and moderate (41%) soil burn severity. (see map on page 1). The more severe a fire's effects are on the soil, the more likely those soils will erode in subsequent rainstorms – especially in locations with steep slopes. Erosion after fires can cause tremendous damage to homes and other structures in the years after a fire.

Developed areas (both urban and rural) were not mapped for soil burn severity. This method has been developed for wildland vegetation and landscapes and therefore is not appropriate for describing effects of fire on developed lands and burned structures. As such, these areas were not visited or evaluated by the BAER team.

## Geology

The team identified the geologic conditions and processes that have shaped and altered the watersheds and landscapes and assessed the impacts from the fire on those conditions and processes that could affect downstream critical values. Using the understanding of rock types and characteristics, geomorphic processes, and distribution of geologic hazards helps predict how the watersheds will respond to and be impacted by upcoming storms.

The fire perimeter is within the South Cascades Province of Washington. Bedrock is composed of Oligocene volcaniclastic deposits (23%), Miocene acidic (felsic) intrusive deposits (21%), and Pleistocene andesite flows (11%). Pleistocene alpine glacial drift (25%) is found in valleys and isolated areas. Volcanic ash from Mount St. Helen eruptions mantles the landscape. Landslides in and around the fire perimeter are present and easily identified using bare earth LiDAR imagery.

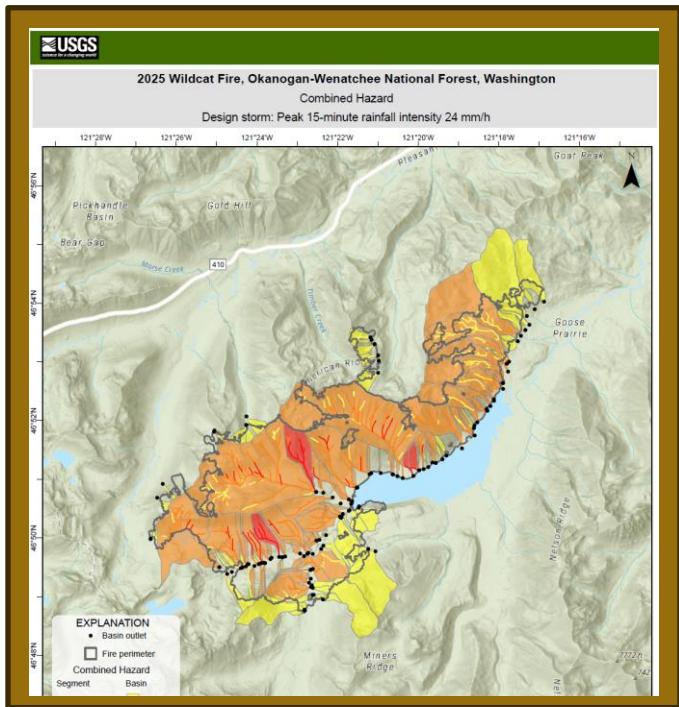
The team provided soil burn severity field data to the US Geological Survey Landslide Hazard Program to assist in forecasting the probability, potential volumes, and hazards of debris flows through their developed empirical models. The USGS Post-fire Debris Flow Hazard Model was performed using the fire perimeter dated 09/23/2025 and identify areas of increased mass movement under post-fire condition (see map on page 3).

## Hydrology

Primary watershed response is expected to include an initial flush of ash and burned materials, erosion in drainages and on steep slopes in the burned area, increased peak flows and sediment transport and deposition, and debris flows. Watershed response is dependent on the occurrence of rainstorms and rain-on-snow events and will likely be greatest with initial storm events. Increased watershed response is most likely in areas with high to moderate soil burn severity. Disturbances will become less evident as vegetation is reestablished, providing ground cover that reduces erosion and increases surface roughness which slows flow accumulation and increases infiltration.

A rapid hydrologic assessment suggests that these landscape responses will likely lead to increased challenges at road-stream crossings, trails, water intakes, and other infrastructure on USFS land. Several culverts along the 1800349 and 1802 roads may see increased flow and debris which could result in road damage or failure. Landowners along

these roads or downstream areas with high or moderate Soil Burn Severity (SBS) may see affects to their access.



## Critical Values

The first critical value BAER teams assess is always human life and safety on National Forest System lands. During and after heavy rainstorms, Forest Service employees and visitors to National Forest System Lands could be threatened by floodwaters and debris flows. In addition, users of roads within and downstream of the burned areas may be affected by road washouts during and after heavy rainstorms. The National Weather Service can establish an early warning alert plan for areas that are potentially at risk from these events. The BAER team recommends general warning signs and communications to travelers on any National Forest System roads and trails within or directly adjacent to the fire.

## Roads and Bridges

Roads in and downstream of burned areas are at risk of damage due to post-fire conditions. The most likely threat due to the fires is clogging of culverts,

bridges, and other in-channel infrastructure from the higher levels of floatable debris (especially burned trees) in burned watersheds. Once blocked by debris, road drainage structures no longer function and the stream flows over the road, often causing considerable damage and limiting access. Various measures can reduce this risk, including protecting culvert inlets with debris racks, removing large floatable debris from channels upstream of structures before floods, and making heavy equipment available and readily mobilized during storm events to keep structures clear of debris.

Debris flows are less likely than debris-laden flood flows, but they pose a greater threat to roads when they do occur and are difficult to mitigate. Critical values addressed in the BAER report include Forest Service System Roads and related drainage features. Treatments for the protection of these roads includes storm proofing drainage features, storm inspection and response funds, and the insertions of stream crossing dips.

## Recreation

National Forest System recreation infrastructure includes campgrounds, trails, and day use areas. Most of the recreation assets within the Wildcat burned area relate to trailheads and trails within the burn area. Similar to roads, recreation infrastructure could be damaged in post-fire storm events.

The team proposes trail warning signs to inform the public of increased fire related hazards at trailheads and where trails enter burn areas.

## Botany

Invasive plants adversely affect native plant communities through allelopathy (suppression of growth of a native plant by release of a toxin from a nearby invasive plant) and direct competition for water and resources. Over time, native plant diversity decreases as invasive plants expand, reducing habitat for native plant species and wildlife. Shifts from diverse native plant

communities to non-native invasive plant dominance could alter future fire behavior, intensity, extent, and season of burning.

Current infestations are primarily located along roads, old dozer lines, campgrounds, and trails throughout the burned area, with interior areas being largely un-infested. However, the burned area creates conditions for invasive species to outcompete native plants. The team recommends a treatment of Early Detection, Rapid Response (EDRR) to monitor for noxious weed infestation and expansion in areas disturbed due to mechanical suppression activity and burned areas prone to new noxious weed infestations.

## Cultural Resources

The most typical post-fire threats to cultural sites are physical threats such as erosion or damage from (now dead) falling trees. In some cases, newly exposed artifacts are threatened by human damaging activities such as looting or vandalism. Cultural resources were evaluated by the team and treatments proposed as necessary to protect these values from post-fire threats. Cedar trees with bark peal markings scattered throughout the fire. Some have burned while others are expected to survive due to their location within moderate, low and unburned SBS areas. No treatment recommended

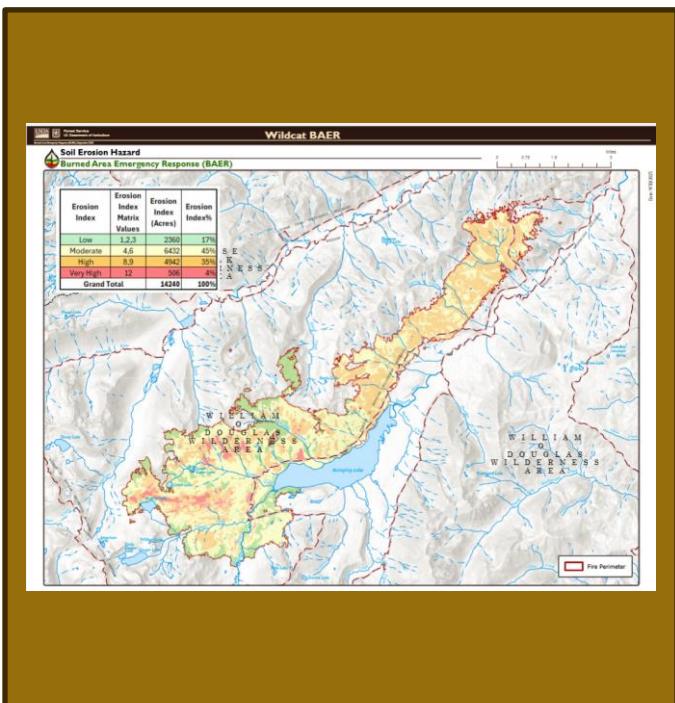
## Anticipated Vegetation Recovery

Post-fire recovery varies greatly based on climate, vegetation types and burn severity. It is typical for recovery to take between 3-5 years for reestablishment of ground cover. The persistence of drought in the years following wildfires also delays the recovery time frame. Even with only a short period of time since fire containment, resprouting of trees and shrubs as well as emergence of forbs have been noted within the burned area.

## Non-Forest Service Values

Since fire effects know no administrative boundaries, additional threats exist for assets not

owned or managed by the Forest Service. Post-fire emergency response is a shared responsibility. There are several Federal, State, and local agencies



that have emergency response responsibilities or authorities in the post-fire environment. The BAER team and local unit BAER Coordinator has engaged with interagency partners to facilitate consideration of off-Forest values covered through other programs with the relevant responsible entities.

## Conclusion

There are multiple phases of post-fire actions after a wildfire covering suppression repair through long-term recovery. BAER is the rapid assessment of burned watersheds by a BAER team to identify imminent post-wildfire threats to human life and safety, property, and critical natural or cultural resources on National Forest System lands and take immediate actions to implement emergency stabilization measures before the first major storms. The BAER team has identified imminent threats to critical values based on a rapid assessment of the area burned by the Wildcat Fire. The assessment was conducted using the best available methods to analyze the potential for damage from post-fire

threats, including flooding and debris flows. The findings provide the information needed to prepare and protect National Forest System critical values against post-fire threats.

BAER treatments cannot prevent all the potential flooding or soil erosion impacts, especially after a wildfire-changed landscape. It is important for the public to stay informed and prepared for potentially dramatic increased run-off events. Many burned-area watersheds were already hydrologically responsive to rainfall and prone to erosion and sediment transport prior to the fire and will likely be even more responsive due to post-fire conditions. However, vegetation recovery is anticipated to be rapid with ground cover approaching pre-fire conditions within 1-3 years, which will attenuate any post-fire effects on watershed processes. The Forest Service will continue to provide information and participate in interagency efforts to address threats to public and private values resulting from the Wildcat Fire. Information can be found on-line at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/okanogan-wenatchee/fire/resources>

The Forest Service will continue to work towards long-term recovery and restoration of the

burned area in coordination with efforts to rebuild and restore the communities affected. A vegetation burn severity map, or mortality map, may be produced as a part of the recovery efforts to help other scientists, such as wildlife biologists, botanists, and silviculturists understand what to expect from this changed landscape for wildlife habitat, invasive weeds, timber salvage, and reforestation needs.

### **Local Forest Service Leadership**

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### **References:**

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